



Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Randy Bush
Text: Luke 24:1-10

April 20, 2025

Breaking the Silence

At some point on the evening of that very first Easter, Mary Magdalene tried to get some sleep. I can well imagine that her mind was racing, trying to process everything she'd seen that day. Remember, she had not gone to the cemetery early that morning expecting to see an empty tomb. Mary was simply hoping to complete the burial rituals that had been left incomplete when the sun set on Friday. But over and over, the Easter scene played out before her eyes: the rolled away stone, no Jesus on the burial slab inside, and two messengers asking why she was looking for the living in a place of the dead.

Perhaps even harder to grapple with was the fact that, as a witness to the empty tomb, she had been entrusted with this amazing story. She now had to break the silence and tell others that Jesus was alive. She had already shared her testimony with the other disciples, but honestly they had had trouble believing her. What would it be like tomorrow when others asked her about Jesus? What would she say? Maybe it would help if she practiced ahead of time how she would share the news about Jesus' resurrection.

I often practice ahead of time the things I'm about to say. For example, when I have free time, I call members on the Immanuel church rolls, just to check in with people, especially those I haven't met before. If it's a new person to me and I'm not sure what exactly to say to them, I'll ask which pastor they know at Immanuel. If they say Rob or Teresa, I know they're a pretty new member. If they say Dr. Block and ask how Deborah is doing, I know they've been a member for a while. If they say they miss Bill Johnstone's jokes, I know they're one of our older members. And if they admit they haven't been to church in a while, but they always liked Rev. Finnie (who retired in 1968), I know to make sure a deacon is assigned to them because they've got to be as old as Methuselah. (Apologies to those of you who knew Rev. Finnie.)

To tell the Easter story, it probably is good to practice ahead of time what you want to say. It is a worthwhile exercise to remember the details of that morning - to see if what you remember matches up with what is described in the bible. Jesus' crucifixion on Good Friday was a public event. It happened outside the city walls and was likely witnessed by scores of people. A small group removed his body from the cross and was given permission to place it in a nearby tomb. They moved with haste because such work was forbidden once the sun set and the Jewish Sabbath began. The Sabbath concluded at sundown on Saturday, so the first time anyone could visit the grave again would be early morning on Sunday, which is precisely what the women did. But when they arrived, the tomb was open; and when they entered, no body was in sight. Just

then, two figures appeared beside them, startling them before repeating back the very prophecies Jesus himself had said: the Son of Man will be arrested, crucified, and then rise on the third day. As they said these things to the women, it was as if they could hear Jesus speaking those very words once more. They remembered. The pieces of the puzzle clicked together. The story took shape in their minds and now they could break their silence and put it into words for others.

I'll let you in on a bit of a secret. Ministers may write sermons every week, but it never stops being a challenge putting the wonder and richness of the Christian faith into words. I don't want to speak for Rob or Teresa, but my assumption is that for each of us, when we're out in the world or when we have conversations with any of you, it is a challenge to know when to mention Jesus or to shift the conversation we're having from things of this world to the transforming power of the Easter gospel. Indulge me as I share a personal story about a visit I had with a dear, older church member named Madeline Eliot. Madeline lived in a nursing home. She was diabetic and had to be careful what she ate, but she also had a wicked sweet tooth. I visited her one year around Easter. It seemed no matter what I said to her, she wanted to talk about food. I wanted to tell her about the church; she wanted to talk about chocolate cake. I wanted to tell her about recent church programs; she wanted to talk about church potlucks with heaping platters of chicken, ham, and fish. Once she mentioned the word "fish," the little minister-demon that I carry around on my shoulder whispered in my ear that I needed to talk about Jesus more. So I shifted the discussion about fish into a brilliant mini-sermon about how Jesus' first disciples were fishermen, and how he'd once fed the crowd with a few loaves of bread and fish; and after he was raised from the dead on Easter, he appeared to those same disciples and shared a meal of fish with them. Then I said, "Madeline, isn't that good news?" Darned if the next thing she said to me was: "You know what I like about Easter? Jelly beans." So we talked about jelly beans, and we laughed a bit, and said a short prayer. In the end, I think the value of that visit wasn't when I tried to talk about Jesus as much as when I was just there with Madeline as a friend, listening to her stories, trusting that something real and faithful was happening even if not all the words I spoke would have sounded like an Easter Sunday sermon.

What happened on Easter isn't something that we have to understand in all its miraculous details and then summarize succinctly in an elevator speech we share with anyone who'll listen. When the angelic messengers confronted Mary Magdalene and the women at the tomb, they didn't go on and on about the resurrection. They didn't try to overwhelm them with details about what miraculous thing had happened during the night behind the gravestone on that holy day. No, they talked about the Jesus who had walked the streets of Galilee, who had taught the crowds, who'd been arrested and killed in Jerusalem, and yet who'd promised to be with them again. At that point, scripture says "Then they remembered his words" - all the things Jesus had said, the whole story. It's that whole story that helps us make sense of this world. It's that whole

story that people hopefully see or hear or come to understand for themselves through the way we live and relate to others in this world.

People sometimes object to going to church, saying that they don't believe everything that's in the bible and that they particularly have trouble with the story of the Easter resurrection. I hear that concern and I know it is an issue even for many of you, but I don't think resurrection is as big a deal as people make it out to be. Christian writer John Pavlovitz has talked about this, and the analogy he uses involves Clark Kent's glasses. There are dozens of superhero movies now in the Marvel and DC universes, but one of the oldest superheroes is Superman – faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, that guy. Perhaps the most amazing part of Superman is that he doesn't hide his true identity behind a mask, like Batman, Spiderman, or Wolverine. No, he simply puts on a pair of non-descript, black frame glasses and he becomes Clark Kent, the mild-mannered reporter. Such a simple thing: put on glasses – Clark Kent; take them off – Superman.

Pavlovitz uses the analogy of Superman's glasses to remind us that what separates us from the life we have vs. the life we could have is often a line so narrow that we'd be shocked if we stopped to realize it. As he put it, most of us are only one decision away from completely rewriting our personal story – one conversation, one relationship, one volunteer opportunity, one moment of fresh clarity – and suddenly a whole new life opens up before us (John Pavlovitz, Hope and Other Superpowers). The line that Mary Magdalene stepped over on Easter morning was ultimately quite narrow. On one side was a cemetery and burial spices; on the other side was the open doorway to an empty tomb. On one side was a scared disciple, unsure what to do next; on the other side was a woman running back to her friends in the Upper Room filled with amazement. Glasses on, glasses off – that Easter, it was as simple as that.

So much of what it means to believe in the resurrection, to be people of Easter faith comes down to what the angels said to the women: *Why do you look for the living among the dead?* Stop looking for life among the shadows of cemeteries, among soul-crushing cynicism and fear. Stop looking for life among policies of war, capital punishment, and social prejudice – among mindsets that only think in terms of “us vs. them.” Stop imagining that others in this world don't want the exact same good things for their kids, for their families, for their nation as we want for ours. Regularly ask yourself whether the choices you make, no matter how small, bring life or bring death. Are we constantly strolling through a cemetery of death or are we able to make a joyful dash up the path of resurrection life?

One last story: Desmond Tutu is a modern-day saint who has preached from this pulpit. Years ago during the dark days of apartheid, the South African government canceled a political rally, so Bishop Tutu called everyone to a worship service in St. George's cathedral. The walls were lined with soldiers and riot police carrying guns and

bayonets, ready to close it down if needed. Tutu began to speak of the evils of apartheid – how the nervous rulers that propped it up were doomed to fail. He pointed a finger at the police and boldly said, “You may be powerful – very powerful – but you are not God. God cannot be mocked. You have already lost.” Then, in a moment of unbearable tension, the bishop seemed to soften. Coming out from behind the pulpit, he flashed that radiant Tutu smile and began to bounce up and down with glee. “Therefore, since you have already lost, we are inviting you to join the winning side.” The crowd roared, the police melted away, and the people began to dance.

Step across the line to the Easter side of life. Stop looking for the living among the dead. Stand beside Mary Magdalene; break your silence; tell the world the story they are so desperate to hear. Sometimes use words. Like the old words of Philip Brooks: *Tomb, thou shalt not hold him longer; death is strong, but life is stronger. Stronger than the dark, the light. Stronger than the wrong, the right. Faith and hope triumphant say, “Christ arose on Easter Day.”* Amen.